

WELCOME TO THE FIRST EDITION OF THE S.A.F.E. NEWSLETTER!



In this first issue, you'll find a brief introduction to the organization Narațiuni S.A.F.E.: who we are and what we offer. Our article on the EU's new digital architecture for migration and Romania's role within it. News about our first project partnership and our participation in the International Journalism Festival in Perugia. Also, information about a draft law on national security that would grant Romanian intelligence services extensive powers to surveil citizens using AI, without prior judicial oversight. The state of Romanian democracy in 2025, as documented by a coalition of NGOs: a year marked by attacks on journalists, a worrying rise in SLAPP cases, and evidence that social media algorithms favored certain candidates during the election campaign. And a book recommendation about the surveillance industry that we think you'd enjoy.

The newsletter is also available in [Romanian language here](#).

- **Resources S.A.F.E. to use**

S.A.F.E. Narratives, your digital security partner

Romania's digital space is increasingly hostile to those who expose injustice, defend rights or are targets of hate speech, and not only online. In recent years, investigative journalists have been surveilled by state authorities, civic activists have faced legal intimidation for speech on social media, and civil society organizations handle sensitive data of vulnerable beneficiaries without access to all the tools to protect it. **S.A.F.E. Narratives - Secure Action for Freedom of Expression Foundation** was built specifically for this gap and now, we want to introduce ourselves as your resource.

S.A.F.E. Narratives is a human rights NGO founded in December 2025, based in Bucharest. We work at the intersection of digital security and fundamental rights,

supporting **journalists, activists, and civic organisations** - with particular attention to **communities most vulnerable to discrimination in Romania**. We also monitor legislation and public policies affecting digital rights and freedom of expression.

What we offer

S.A.F.E. Guard provides direct, practical support to strengthen digital security to our audience. The starting point is simple: fill out a short needs assessment form on our website, and we work with you from there.

Stay S.A.F.E. is our ongoing public information campaign on freedom of expression, digital rights, and threats in the digital space, from online harassment and compromised accounts to censorship and surveillance. Follow us on Instagram [@safe.narratives](#) and Mastodon [@safe_narratives](#).

Get involved

S.A.F.E. Narratives is newly founded and growing, with the aim to become part of a community. You can engage with us as a **beneficiary** (reach out if you or your organization needs digital security support), as a **partner** (if your work complements ours), or as a **volunteer or donor** supporting our mission.

Rights respected - online and offline.

- S.A.F.E. Updates

(Our first) Article

Border state: Romania and the digital architecture of EU migration

Three EU legislative instruments taking effect in 2026 - Eurodac, the Screening Regulation, and the proposed Return Regulation - together constitute a system of total digital surveillance of non-EU migrants: from biometric registration at the border, to data stored in interconnected databases accessible to law enforcement across the EU, to forced return to countries with which the person has no connection. The present S.A.F.E. Narratives article analyses the concrete implications of this architecture, the rights it puts under pressure, and why Romania - newly a Schengen external border state, with insufficient institutional capacity and a growing migrant worker population - is particularly exposed.

[Read the full article here.](#)

First project application

Roma Collective Art&Culture Association, a Roma-led arts and culture association based in Bucharest chose S.A.F.E. Narratives as partner in submitting together a project application!

The cultural co-creation project called "Loly – Wearing Our Story" places Roma youth, fashion, identity, and community storytelling at the centre. The main role of S.A.F.E. Narratives will be to organize two digital safety and GDPR workshops for the young participants, in relation to the social media campaign associated to the project, but also to the youth's day-to-day digital presence. Additionally, we will contribute with the technical setup and the costs of a website for the Roma Collective Art&Culture Association. This website will serve as a permanent digital repository for the project, as well as for past and future initiatives.

Results on the application are pending.

S.A.F.E. Narratives at the International Journalism Festival, Perugia 2026

The International Journalism Festival (IJF) in Perugia is the largest annual media event in Europe; it brings together journalists, media researchers, civil society organisations, and institutional stakeholders for a series of panels, workshops, and conversations. The prevailing themes that characterised this year's edition were the post-AI newsroom, election integrity and global democracy, and finally, journalist safety and impunity.

We focused our attendance on three clusters of sessions that directly addressed our work: human rights and the safety of journalists, feminist perspectives on reporting and newsroom culture, and the growing role of digital tools in both newsroom practice and the surveillance of press freedom defenders. It is hard to make a selection, but the following must be mentioned, in no particular order:

[Surviving the story: hands-on infosec for journalists under threat](#) with journalists Manisha Ganguly, visual forensics lead, the Guardian and Robert Flummerfelt, specialist digital security

[The future of gender-just journalism: from coverage to culture](#), which explored how gender justice is not a niche topic; it is a critical lens required to accurately report on climate, technology, politics, and economics.

[The Epstein files: where did the media get it wrong?](#) which benefited from the participation of two Epstein survivors, who also discussed their interactions with the press, ethics and covering trauma and survivors of sex trafficking, followed by a candid conversation between Amy Wallace, co-author with Virginia Roberts Giuffre

of her autobiography [*Nobody's Girl: A Memoir of Surviving Abuse and Fighting for Justice*](#), and Eliza Anyangwe, editor-in-chief of global women-focused newsroom Fuller, in the next [session](#)

[*Gaza: silenced in the name of impartiality*](#) and [*Bearing witness in conflict zones \(Gaza, Yemen, Sudan\)*](#), attended also by Wael Al-Dahdouh is bureau chief in Gaza for [Al Jazeera](#).

Full programme and presentation of speakers is still available [here](#). We look forward to next year, for more invaluable sessions, hearing from and meeting amazing people, whose work is inspiring for any activist.

- **S.A.F.E. to know**
- **Bill no. 565/2025 on national security**

We learned recently from [SNOOP](#) that bill PL-X no. 565/2025 on national security, tacitly adopted by the Chamber of Deputies and now under urgent debate in the Senate, is raising serious concerns among legal and data protection experts. Although the initiative aims to align Romanian legislation with European Court of Human Rights standards, the text would allow intelligence services (SRI, SIE, SPP, MAI, MAPN and MJ through specialized internal units)* to collect and process personal data through automated means, including AI algorithms, without a prior court order and without an independent oversight mechanism. Through AI, surveillance could cover tens or hundreds of thousands of people simultaneously, a "*blank check*" for the services, as experts warn.

Key terms like "online resources" or "automated means" are vague enough to risk abuse or unconstitutionality, as flagged by both the Legislative Council and the Ministry of Justice. The only oversight mechanism remains parliamentary, but it is considered ineffective, and the last public report on SRI's activities approved by Parliament dates back to 2020. The SRI confirmed it participated in drafting the bill and already uses AI algorithms, but declined to comment on any Palantir-type software, citing state secrecy. The plenary vote is expected after the parliamentary recess.

**Romanian Intelligence Service, Foreign Intelligence Service, Protection and Guard Service, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Justice.*

- **The State of Democracy in Romania Report for 2025**

In April 2026, the Coalition "NGOs for Citizens" released [The 2025 Report on the State of Democracy in Romania](#) (Authors: CeRe, Centrul despre Inovare Publică, ActiveWatch, ApTI, Expert Forum, Greenpeace România. Supported by Civitates / Network of European Foundations). In the authors' words: *"The year 2025 was not a good one for democracy. The rule of law and democratic institutions are undergoing a period of profound crisis, marked by institutional failures that followed the shock of the cancellation of the November 2024 presidential election."*

The report is larger, but we present below some excerpts:

A hostile environment for journalists and activists

POT President and MP Anamaria Gavrilă threatened journalists accredited to Parliament, telling them they were "an endangered species." George Simion (AUR) called two NGOs an "agency that can't stop meddling in our affairs" and stated that "they will have to answer for it." Also in 2025, PressOne journalists Răzvan Filip and Renata Mogîldea received death threats after publishing investigations into neo-Nazi organizations; HotNews received online threats after being the target of inflammatory remarks made by George Simion (AUR); a journalist from Gorj was verbally abused, threatened, pushed, and forced to delete images captured in the public domain by a representative of a construction company.

Investigative journalist Emilia Șercan published evidence of plagiarism by the Minister of Justice in January 2026, and the publication of the material was followed by a smear campaign whose main drivers were PSD politicians, the România TV station, and public figures close to the PSD. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media issued an official appeal to Romanian authorities to refrain from behavior that could incite hostility toward the media. Separately, the DNA issued surveillance warrants against journalists, including a two-month wiretap of a reporter whose status as a journalist had been confirmed, prompting calls for an urgent review of EU standards on press freedom (EMFA).

Strategic lawsuits (SLAPP): an increasingly used tool in the arsenal of press intimidation

Among the cases in 2025 were a businessman and his airline who sued an investigative publication for a cumulative record sum of 3.465 million euros; a real estate developer who succeeded in dissolving a civic association due to legal costs it could not cover and attempted the same with a second organization; and a publicist, later a member of parliament, who pursued a journalist in court for approximately two and a half years for accurately reporting on his public activities. Most of the

complaints were ultimately dismissed, but not before years of legal pressure and a chilling effect on journalism. Romania ranks in the top three in Europe for abusive lawsuits targeting those who speak out, according to the European Commission's Rule of Law Report. Romania has failed to meet the May 7, 2026 deadline for transposing the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive. The draft law is currently before the Senate.

Digital Rights: DSA, Disinformation, and the Issue of Algorithms

Romania's implementation of the Digital Services Act (DSA) has yielded mixed results. The National Audiovisual Council (CNA) abusively expanded its jurisdiction to online video content and ordered the removal of content protected by freedom of expression, while election offices were caught censoring online media during the May 2025 presidential campaign. A study by ApTI found that Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok algorithms prioritized polarizing messages, exposed minors to political messages disproportionately, and favored certain candidates, even when users showed equal interest in all of them. The platforms did not consistently respond to reports of illegal content, and civil society still lacks access to platform data, despite the obligations set forth in the DSA.

In 2025, the government issued 93 emergency ordinances (and 23 ordinary ones, 116 in total), and a Constitutional Court ruling eliminated the requirement to publish online the asset declarations of public officials, a move condemned by civil society as a major setback for integrity.

Full report (Romanian language): www.stareademocratiei.ro

- **Reading Corner**

Pegasus: The Story of the World's Most Dangerous Spyware *Laurent Richard & Sandrine Rigaud (2023)*

Pegasus is the behind-the-scenes account of one of the most sophisticated and invasive surveillance weapons ever created (up to that point, at least); a spyware system developed by Israeli company NSO Group and sold to governments around the world. Once installed on a target's phone, Pegasus can track their daily movements in real time, gain control of the device's microphones and cameras at will, and capture all videos, photos, emails, texts, and passwords - encrypted or not. This data can then be exfiltrated, stored on outside servers, and leveraged to blackmail, intimidate, and silence victims. Most chillingly, Pegasus can infect a

phone through a missed WhatsApp call, for instance and the target doesn't even need to answer.

Beyond the technical story, the book raises broader questions about privacy, democracy, press freedom, and the growing power of surveillance technologies. It argues that tools originally marketed for fighting terrorism and crime can also be weaponized against civil society and democratic institutions.

This book is essential reading for journalists, activists, human rights defenders, and anyone who handles sensitive information in their professional life. It reads like a thriller, but every detail is documented and verified. It is, simultaneously, a technical explainer, a moral argument, and a tribute to the power of collaborative journalism.

First published 2023 by Henry Holt and Company, an imprint of Macmillan Books. Introduction by Rachel Maddow.

Sources to follow up, additional to the book:

- Forbidden Stories — [About the Pegasus Project](#)
 - Amnesty International Security Lab — [The Pegasus Project](#)
 - PBS Frontline — [Pegasus Project Live Blog](#)
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Thank you for reading all the way to the end.

We know this first edition was long. There was a lot to say, and we wanted to say it well. Future editions will find their rhythm.

If something here resonated, share it. If you know someone who should be reading this, forward it. And if you are a journalist, activist, or civil society organisation wondering whether S.A.F.E. Narratives can be useful to you, we would genuinely love to hear from you. Find us at safenarratives.org, on Instagram [@safe.narratives](#), and on Mastodon [@safe_narratives](#).

We will be back. Until then, rights respected, online and offline.

The S.A.F.E. Narratives team